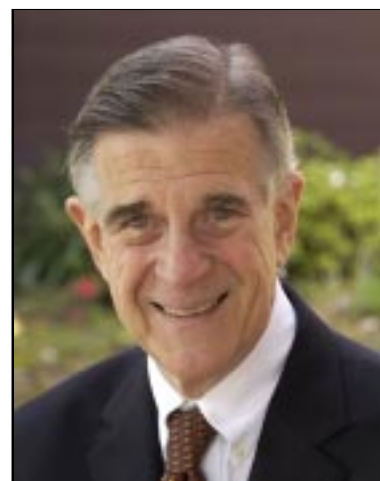


13th District
108th Congress

UPDATE



WASHINGTON, DC

MAY 2004

Be Prepared for Medicare Drug Discount Cards

Medicare beneficiaries will soon be bombarded with advertisements, mailings, and promotions for participation in a new Medicare-approved prescription drug discount card program. This program is part of the Republican Medicare prescription drug bill passed by Congress and signed into law by the President late last

year. This transitional program will only be in effect from June 2004 through December 2005. Starting this month, Medicare beneficiaries will be able to purchase a private Medicare-approved drug discount card (with a maximum annual fee of \$30.00). In California, there will be some 28 different cards on the market. Medicare beneficiaries will be limited to one Medicare-approved card and will only be allowed to change cards once, during the 2004 year-end open enrollment period. If you are enrolled in a Medicare HMO that offers its own discount card, you may only be allowed to purchase that card.

These cards are being promoted as offering significant price discounts on your prescription drugs. However, the law does not

require any specific level of savings and it is very uncertain how much financial help the cards will provide. If you already have a discount card offered in the private marketplace, your savings will probably not be much differ-

ent. You can keep any cards you now have and can have multiple non-Medicare-approved cards,



but you can only use one card per prescription.

Seniors and people with disabilities whose incomes are below \$12,569 a year for individuals or \$16,862 for couples, and who are not enrolled in MediCal or a retiree drug plan will be eligible for a \$600 credit toward the purchase of prescription drugs in 2004 and again in 2005. Drug card companies may require enrollees to fill out a separate form to apply for the credit, and beneficiaries will be required to attest to their income level by signing that form.

Navigating the maze of available cards will be difficult. Cards may offer good deals on some of your medications, but no value for others. The specific drugs that are discounted will vary among the cards and may vary within a specific card throughout the year. Not all pharmacies will partici-

"Navigating the maze of available cards will be difficult. Cards may offer good deals on some of your medications, but no value for others."

—Pete Stark

Defending American Jobs: A Stark Priority

Despite new reports of promising job growth, there are strong signs that the economy isn't done losing jobs. According to a recent study by the Haas School of Business, 14 million high paying technology jobs representing 11 percent of the total U.S. workforce are in danger of being outsourced overseas.

The specter of this type of massive job loss would only compound the staggering layoffs and unemployment that have already hit hard in the Bay Area, not to mention the 3 million good paying manufacturing jobs that have been lost across the US over the

Continued on page 3.

Continued on page 3.

✓ KEY VOTES

Below are some of the key votes that Congress has taken so far this year. They've been selected based on inquiries received from East Bay residents.

✓ **THE BUDGET – H CON RES 393**, a resolution putting forth a budget for fiscal year 2005 for the US Government. The resolution, passed along partisan lines, fails to include adequate funding for the ongoing Iraq conflict, dramatically underfunds education, health care, child care and other domestic priorities, and fails to address our growing deficit. Passed 215-212. Stark voted NO.

✓ **IRAQ RESOLUTION – H RES 557**, a resolution to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the initiation of US action in Iraq. It also proclaimed the world a safer place since the US invasion. Passed 228-195. Stark voted NO.

✓ **EQUALIZING PAY RAISES FOR CIVILIAN AND MILITARY PERSONNEL IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT – H RES 581**, a resolution to ensure that members of the uniformed services receive the same pay increases as those received by civilian government personnel. Passed 299-126. Stark voted YES.

✓ **THE ROTC AND MILITARY RECRUITER EQUAL ACCESS TO CAMPUS ACT – H RES 580**, a resolution that would require colleges and universities to provide full and equal access to ROTC and military recruiters or lose federal funding. The military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy discriminates against gays and lesbians. This resolution requires such access even if colleges or universities have policies that prohibit recruitment from private companies that discriminate in such a manner. Passed 223-202. Stark voted NO.

Iraq Deadline Provides an Opportunity for Genuine International Cooperation

On June 30th, the Administration plans for the American-led Coalition Provisional Authority to cede governing authority in Iraq to an Iraqi governing body sanctioned by the United Nations. Despite this alleged transfer of power, it is expected that 100,000 American troops will remain on the ground in Iraq to face continued chaos and violence.

Military officials there concede that patience among Iraqis for the US presence is running thin. Violent resistance continues to intensify as American troops face near daily attacks and mounting unrest. They understand first hand that the window in which the US can work to restore order in Iraq is closing quickly.

Meanwhile, a staggering fifty-percent of Iraqis are out of work. Basic services like electricity and running water have been slow to be restored. In some areas, funding for uncompleted reconstruction projects has dried up. Yet, the US corporations tasked with rebuilding continue to prosper from billions of dollars in no-bid government contracts while employing mostly foreign workers.



SOURCE: U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Master Sgt. Gene LaDoucer

Despite the US' failures, Republican leaders in Congress are considering another spending bill to provide billions more to post-war Iraq. It is wrong to commit more lives and scarce resources to Iraq without President Bush adequately responding to the problems there. Americans deserve to know the sacrifices required of the continued US involvement. We must be provided a clear strategy for the US' eventual exit from Iraq.

While mostly symbolic, the upcoming June 30th transfer of power provides a long overdue opportunity for the President to transfer the burden of Iraq's reconstruction to a larger international coalition. This new partnership could include nations from the Arab and Muslim World in addition to major allies in Europe, especially those capable of providing the increased troop levels that would allow many of our GIs to come home.

In addition to the UN-led Iraqi governing body, a genuinely international reconstruction effort would lend new legitimacy to Iraq's transition to self-governance. A truly international presence would likely weaken the influence of those hostile to the US who've exploited strong anti-American sentiment to derail this process.

We must do all we can to help the Iraqi people establish a unified, democratic government that protects the rights and freedoms of all Iraq's citizens. Full international cooperation in the future of Iraq is crucial to achieving this goal. I worry that this Administration will not embrace this approach.

Defending American Jobs, *continued from page 1.*

past three years. This dangerous trend is due in no small part to American companies exporting millions of technology and manufacturing jobs overseas to take advantage of cheap labor and weak or nonexistent labor standards.

For its part, the Bush Administration has taken the position that the outsourcing of jobs is part of the natural progression of open trade and is good for the economy. I strongly disagree. We ought to instead ask if outsourcing is good for working Americans and whether it is making our families more financially secure and our communities more economically viable.

For far too long, American corporations have been allowed to leave workers and communities across this country high and dry while at the same time collecting tax breaks and subsidies from American taxpayers. It is time to say enough is enough.

Corporations should not be allowed to collect corporate welfare when the long-term economic welfare of so many Americans is being hurt by the drive to move jobs out of the country. That is why I am an original cosponsor of the *Defending American Jobs Act*. This bipartisan legislation would help protect good paying technology and manufacturing jobs from being outsourced overseas.



FOCUS ON BAY AREA UNEMPLOYMENT

Congressman Stark joined Reps. George Miller, Barbara Lee and Mike Honda this past March to release a report on local unemployment that found as many as 54,000 unemployed Bay Area workers will have lost or will lose their unemployment benefits within the first 6 months of 2004. Congressman Stark continues to vigorously demand the extension of temporary unemployment assistance to help Bay Area workers and their families make ends meet in the midst of long-term unemployment.

To read the report, *Thousands of Jobless Workers in the San Francisco Bay Area Are Losing Unemployment Benefits*, visit Congressman Stark's website at: <http://www.house.gov/stark/issues/economy>

The *Defending American Jobs Act* would prohibit federal grants, loans and loan guarantees from going to companies if they lay off a greater percentage of workers in the US than they lay off in other countries. This bill lets big business know that outsourcing

will come with a price. More importantly, taxpayers will no longer be forced to subsidize the export of good paying American jobs – jobs that make our nation stronger and more secure when they're kept here at home.

Medicare Approved Drug Discount Cards, *continued from page 1.*

pate with all cards either. Finding the card that is right for you will require some research—but there is no guarantee one is available that will meet your needs. The California Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP) provides information on drug card options, and can be reached at 510-839-0393. Beneficiaries can also get help by calling 1-800-MEDICARE, or by accessing information at www.medicare.gov.

There have already been inci-

dences of fraud surrounding these cards. Be wary of offers that sound too good to be true. Beneficiaries should never provide personal information to door-to-door salesmen or during unsolicited phone calls. Drug card sponsors must use approved application forms, and the individual cards will carry the Medicare-approved logo (shown in the picture with this article). Any fraud or questionable behavior should be reported immediately to 1-800-MEDICARE.

Unfortunately, the Medicare drug discount card program will not provide significant relief for most Medicare beneficiaries. This complicated program may provide some help for some lower-income beneficiaries, but finding the best card among a sea of options will be difficult. I urge you to use the resources listed above when deciding whether to enroll in the discount card program and to determine what card is best for you.

Stark Works to Help Retirees Maintain Health Coverage

Today, many employers are eliminating retiree health benefits or are forcing retirees to pay all or most of the cost of their health benefits. In the last year alone,

coverage in the individual market. Millions more have health plans that require retirees to pay much of the benefit cost themselves. To ensure these Americans have ac-

cess to affordable health insurance, I have introduced the *Medicare Early Access Act*.

The *Medicare Early Access Act* would allow more than 10

If this bill becomes law, enrollees would receive the same benefits as all other Medicare beneficiaries. A generous refundable tax credit would offset much of the premium, leaving beneficiaries with a fair premium equal to 25 percent of the cost—which is what most employed people pay for coverage. This would make the program affordable for millions of people who might otherwise go without needed health care.

The *Medicare Early Access Act* is one of many common sense solutions that build on what works best in our system. I will be working hard to pass this bill through Congress along with other proposals to expand health insurance to the 44 million Americans without coverage. Expanding access to health care should be a goal on which we can all agree.

"The Medicare Early Access Act would allow over 10 million people between ages 55 and 65 to buy into Medicare as their source for health insurance coverage." —Pete Stark

10% of the nation's largest employers terminated all subsidized health benefits for future retirees. Another 20% said they were likely to do the same in the next three years.

As a result of this disturbing trend, 3.5 million Americans between ages 55 and 65 lack health insurance. An additional 3 million Americans in this age range have been forced to purchase expensive

million people between ages 55 and 65 to buy into Medicare as their source for health insurance coverage. People age 65 and over already rely on Medicare for health coverage, and the system is well suited to provide the same benefits for those between 55 and 65. Building on this successful federal program would be the easiest, most cost efficient way to provide coverage for this vulnerable population.

PETE'S TOWN MEETINGS

Saturday, May 15, 2004

Let me hear your views.

NEWARK

9:00-10:00 a.m.
Silliman Activity Center
6800 Mowry Avenue

SAN LEANDRO

10:30-11:30 a.m.
San Leandro Library
Lecture Hall
300 Estudillo

ALAMEDA

Noon-1:00 p.m.
Bay Farm Elementary School
Multi-Purpose Room
200 Aughinbaugh

Doors open 10 minutes before meetings start.

Congressman Pete Stark
39300 Civic Center Dr., #220
Fremont, CA 94538

How to reach PETE STARK
WASHINGTON OFFICE
(202) 225-5065
DISTRICT OFFICE
South of Union City (510) 494-1388
North of Hayward (510) 247-1388
Internet mail address:
petemail.direct@stark.house.gov
Web address:
<http://www.house.gov/stark/>

TIME VALUE

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